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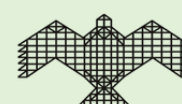
IN FOCUS

Conflict over the Nile Dam: Who, why and what

At the core of the conflict, lies the problem of lower versus upper riparian states, element of historical treaties and mistrust among the actors.

AFRICA IN BRIEF

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COMMENTARY

Conflict over the Nile Dam: Who, why and what

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Apoorva Sudhakar



The Economist

Image Source: The Economist

On 20 February, Ethiopia commenced electricity production at the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD, also known as the Nile Dam). The move garnered criticism from Egypt and Sudan, who questioned the Ethiopian mega project. On 21 February, Egypt wrote to the UNSC wherein it termed the Ethiopian decision a violation of the Declaration of Principles of March 2015. Arab News quoted from the letter which said the Declaration “requires Ethiopia to reach a legally binding agreement on the rules to fill and operate the Renaissance Dam before the start of the filling and operation process.”

In light of these developments, the following questions arise: who are the actors involved, what are their contentions

and how has the conflict panned across a decade?

Three major actors and their concerns

The conflict over the dam involves three actors, Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan. The two tributaries of the Nile – the White Nile and the Blue Nile – converge in Sudan. However, the dam’s location over the Blue Nile provides major control of the river to Ethiopia, which has already completed two fillings of the dam, thereby leading to friction with Egypt.

First, Egypt’s contentions with the dam. Egypt relies on the Nile for over 90 per cent of its freshwater source for its nearly 100-million strong population and maintains that the damming of the river is an existential threat. The lower riparian country is currently undergoing a water shortage, is apprehensive of the speed at which Ethiopia has been filling the dam.

Second, the location of Sudan. The main apprehension of Sudan is that Ethiopia’s filling of the dam will disrupt the water flow and, therefore, affect Sudan’s dams. A BBC news report outlines that Khartoum’s fears were aggravated in 2020 when Addis Ababa closed three diversion outlets, bringing down the lower stream flows and affecting Sudan’s water stations for irrigation and municipal stations. Further, Sudan has also raised concerns regarding the safety of the dam’s location as it is built close to the border of the two countries.

Third, Ethiopia’s objectives behind building the dam. Addis Ababa believes

the dam is key to its development and would solve its power problems. Further, the size and capacity of the GERD would generate surplus power that Ethiopia aims to export, thereby making the country Africa's largest power generator. Ethiopia firmly believes the dam would also solve the flooding problem in neighbouring country Sudan.

Conflict over the GERD: A brief timeline

First, the announcement of the construction. In 2011, Ethiopia chalks out the construction of the GERD, and Egypt conveys its apprehensions over the specifications of the dam.

Second, setting up of impact study panels. In 2012, a committee comprising two members from Addis Ababa, Cairo and Khartoum and international experts was formed. In 2014, four members from the three countries form the Tripartite National Committee; however, several such committees fail to conclude their studies, leading to an impasse in the conflict.

Third, the signing of the Declaration of Principles. In 2015, to thaw the differences, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan signed the Declaration of Principles. The Declaration outlines ten principles including cooperation, regional integration, sustainability, need for fair use of the Nile waters, peaceful settlement of disputes, etc.

Fourth, filling the dam and power generation. In July 2020, Ethiopia began the first filling of the dam and fulfilled a target of 4.9 billion cubic metres. Similarly, in July 2021, Ethiopia fulfilled its target for the second year of adding

13.5 billion cubic metres. This fuelled the tensions between the three countries, especially between Egypt and Ethiopia. In February 2022, Ethiopia began power generation at one of the 13 turbines of the GERD.

Drivers of the conflict

First, the colonial treaties of 1929 and 1959. The 1929 treaty between Egypt and Great Britain granted 48 billion cubic metres of water and four billion cubic metres to Egypt and Sudan respectively. The treaty also provided a veto power to Egypt to object to construction over the Nile or its tributaries. This treaty was reinforced in 1959, when Egypt and Sudan bilaterally signed an agreement, and increased the water allocation to 55.5 billion cubic metres for Egypt, and 18.5 billion cubic metres for Sudan. On the one hand, Egypt maintains these treaties to be inviolable, and on the other, Ethiopia refuses to abide by the same.

Second, lack of agreement over the GERD. Egypt and Sudan contest the Ethiopian actions because citing the absence of a technical agreement on the speed of filling the dam and releasing water. While there is an agreement between the three countries on when the drop in water level will constitute a drought, Ethiopia has no consensus on how much water it will release; the country prefers to retain flexibility over decisions such as these. This has led to mistrust among the countries.

What does the above mean?

At the core of the conflict, elements of lower versus upper riparian states, historical treaties, and lack of trust are at play. Since the first filling of the dam, multiple rounds of talks have been held, but none have brought an outcome that all have accepted. Egypt has been insisting on international actors to assist in settling the issue. However, Ethiopia maintains that the issue is an African problem and prefers organisations like the African Union to play a bigger role.

Specifications of the GERD

The construction of the GERD, the biggest hydropower project in Africa with an estimated cost of USD 4.7 billion, began in 2011; as of 2022, 80 per cent of the construction is complete. The GERD is built over the Blue Nile with a 145-metre height, 1,780m length and a capacity of 74 billion cubic metres. Ethiopia aims to generate 6,000 megawatts of electricity.

AFRICA IN BRIEF

1 March-8 March

By Poulomi Mondal and Apoorva Sudhakar

LIBYA

UN calls on all rival factions to appoint a joint committee

On 4 March, UN advisor to Libya Stephanie Williams called on rival factions to try and resolve the country's constitutional arrangements. Williams sent letters to parliament and the High State Council calling for the nomination of six members each to form a joint committee. The development comes after Fathi Bashaga was sworn in as the new Prime Minister on 3 March in Tobruk in eastern Libya, and the incumbent PM in Tripoli, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, refused to step down. ("[UN urges Libya rivals to appoint joint committee](#)," *BBC*, 4 March 2022; "[Rival Libyan PM sworn in as tensions mount](#)," *BBC*, 3 March 2022)

EGYPT

Egypt raises transit fees for ships passing via the Suez Canal

On 1 March, Egypt increased the transit fees for ships passing through the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal Authority maintained the increase in fees is "in line with the significant growth in the world trade" and would provide for the canal's "development and improvement of the transit service." The statement said there would be a 10 per cent increase in transit fees for ships carrying LPG, chemicals and other bulk products; there would be a seven per cent increase for vessels carrying natural gas, vehicles, general cargo, and multipurpose vessels; and, a five per cent increase on oil tankers and dry bulk vessels. The Authority however did not rule out the possibility of a revision or cancellation of the new rates depending on the developments in global shipping. ("[Egypt raises transit fees for ships passing](#)

[through Suez Canal](#)," *Africanews*, 1 March 2022)

TANZANIA

Chadema Chairman released after prosecution drops terrorism charges, meets President

On 4 March, a session judge ordered the release of opposition leader Freeman Mbowe and three others; the decision came after the prosecution dropped charges of terrorism financing and conspiracy, against the four. Following the prosecution's decision, the judge called for the immediate release of the four from jail. Mbowe, the Chadema party's chairman, was arrested in July 2021 with several others, as they were scheduled to address a meeting demanding constitutional reforms in the country. Following his release, Mbowe met with President Samia Suluhu on the same day. Reuters quoted from the statement from Suluhu's office: "President Samia emphasised the need to join hands to build the nation, through trust and respect built on the foundations of justice." ("[Tanzanian opposition leader freed after seven months in custody](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 4 March 2022) ("[Tanzania's president meets opposition leader Mbowe hours after he is freed](#)," *Reuters*, 5 March 2022)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Attack in northeastern DRC claims 20 lives

On 1 March, an attack in Kikura village in northeastern DRC resulted in 20 civilian casualties. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan militia that has claimed thousands of lives since 2013, is suspected of the attack. The latest attack took place amid a joint operation by the Congolese and Ugandan forces to end the massacres. In 2021, Congolese President Felix

Tshisekedi requested and allowed Ugandan forces to enter DRC and jointly chase the ADF fighters in the country accused of massive humanitarian violations since the 1990s during the DRC Congo crisis. (Lauraine Noelle Vofu Kana, "[At least 20 dead in northeastern DRC after attack](#)," *Africanews*, 1 March 2022)

BURKINA FASO

Military leader sworn in as President approves three-year transition

On 2 March, military leader Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba was sworn in as the transitional president for three years. The development comes after Damiba signed a charter on 1 March, which called for a three-year transition period and subsequent restoration of an elected government by 2025. According to the charter, "The duration of the transition is set at 36 months from the date of the inauguration of the president." A military-backed technical committee which drafted the charter maintained that the transition period on the signed charter is longer than 30 months. The charter also mentions that the transitional president "is not eligible for the presidential, legislative and municipal elections which will be organized to put an end to the transition". The charter says the charter aims to "to fight terrorism, restore the integrity and the national territory." In a related development, on 4 March, the military government appointed Albert Ouedraogo as the transitional Prime Minister. Ouedraogo is an economist and has prior experience in public administration, national development, and in dealing with private companies. ("[Burkina Faso's junta chief signs 3-year transition charter](#)," *Africanews*, 1 March 2022; "[Burkina strongman stages inauguration after 'transition' plan](#)," *Africanews*, 2 March 2022; Nicolas Negoce, "[Burkina Faso junta appoints civilian prime minister](#)," *BBC*, 4 March 2022)

MALI

Rebel attack claims lives of 27 soldiers

On 4 March, the government said at least 27 soldiers were killed and 33 wounded in an attack targeting an army base in Mondoro in central Mali; seven soldiers were missing. The government said 70 terrorists were killed in a response by the military. Al Jazeera's news report explains that the Mondoro base has previously been a target of rebel fighters in September 2019, 50 soldiers were killed in a similar attack on the Mondoro base and a nearby base. Mondoro base is located close to Mali's border with Burkina Faso. ("[Mali rebel attack leaves dozens of soldiers dead](#)," Al Jazeera, 5 March 2022)

GUINEA

Gold mine collapse leads to death of 18

On 3 March, a government spokesperson said at least 18 people had been killed after an informal gold mine collapsed in the western part of the country on 28 February. The spokesperson said rescue operations were still underway. Several accidents in gold mines have been recorded in recent years; in May 2021, 15 people were killed in a gold mine in northeastern Guinea. ("[Guinea govt: At least 18 people were killed in gold mine collapse](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 3 March 2022)

SOUTH AFRICA

High Court orders coronation of the new Zulu king

On 2 March, the High Court of Pietermaritzburg ordered the coronation ceremony of Prince Misuzulu as the king of the Zulu nation in South Africa. The prince will be succeeding his late father Goodwill Zwelithini. Two applications opposing the coronation ceremony were filed; one by one of the King's daughters who demanded postponement of the ceremony and the second by the King's first Queen Sibongile Dlamini, claiming half of the king's estate and his signatures to be forged. However, the court dismissed

both the opposing claims and favoured the coronation of Prince Misuzulu. (Lauraine Noelle Vofo Kana, "[S.Africa: Coronation of Prince Misuzulu to go ahead, court rules](#)," *Africanews*, 2 March 2022)

GENDER

African countries adopt Common Africa Position on gender and climate change

On 3 March, a press release from the African Union said African countries had recently adopted the Common African Position to ensure gender equality in climate action agenda. The Common Africa Position calls for fulfilling existing commitments to the Rio convention and Sendai Framework; strengthening statistical offices to carry out gender analysis on climate change; chart out plans to ensure actions to address climate change and disaster risks are gender-responsive and so on. The press release said that the Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission "acknowledged that women's livelihoods tend to be climate-sensitive, and endangers women more than men." ("[African Countries adopt Common African Position to Integrate Gender Equality in Climate Action Agenda](#)," *African Union*, 3 March 2022)

INTERNATIONAL

African Union concerned about reports on Africans trying to flee Ukraine

On 28 February, the African Union raised concerns over reports that African nationals were being stopped from leaving Ukraine amid the conflict. The statement from the AU said the AU Chair and the Chairperson of the AU Commission "are particularly disturbed by reports that African citizens on the Ukrainian side of the border are being refused the right to cross the border to safety." The two Chairs maintained that "all people have the right to cross international borders during the conflict, and as such, should enjoy the same rights to cross to safety from the conflict in Ukraine, notwithstanding their nationality or racial identity." The statement said: "Reports that Africans are singled out for unacceptable dissimilar treatment would be shockingly racist and in breach international law." ("[Statement of the African Union on the reported ill treatment of Africans trying to leave Ukraine](#)," *African Union*, 28 February 2022)

About the authors

Apoorva Sudhakar is a Project Associate at the National Institute of Advanced Studies and Poulomi Mondal is a postgraduate scholar at the South Asian Studies Centre at the Pondicherry University.

About NIAS Africa Studies

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focussed study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism. ,

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a weekly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and also African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.

About the team

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Other publications from the NIAS-STIR Programme

NIAS Science & Global Studies
The World This Week
Current | Background | Analysis

CWA 4453, 12 December 2021

The Biden-Putin, and Modi-Putin Summits
President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi meet in a diplomatic effort to reduce the budding tensions in the eastern banks of Russia.



The US and Russia: Biden-Putin video conference
On 7 December, US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin met in a video conference in a diplomatic effort to reduce the budding tensions in the eastern banks of Russia.


The US-South Korea Security Alliance has Endured - President Biden was joined and accompanied by President Park in his speech in the virtual summit. Biden and Park discussed the US-South Korea Security Alliance and the US-South Korea Security Alliance. Biden and Park discussed the US-South Korea Security Alliance and the US-South Korea Security Alliance.

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CWA 4454, 14 November 2021

The Coal compromise in COP 26, Xi's power consolidation in China, and a Migrant Crisis in Europe
Russia, UK, Canada, India, and France Crisis (Challenges)



The Glasgow Compromise on Coal: Phasing down, instead of phasing out
The Glasgow summit managed to reach a compromise on coal, and agreed to "phase-down" instead of "phase-out" coal, rather than a "phase-out". The text of the pact was ready.


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CWA 4455, 23 November 2021

Biden-Xi virtual summit, and Russia's ASAT test
Aviation, India and France (Challenges)




China: 'Virtual meeting between Biden and Xi calls for greater cooperation'
Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden met in a virtual summit on 20 November. Biden and Xi discussed the US-China relationship and the US-China relationship.

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Current | Background | Analysis

CWA 4467, 07 November 2021

COP 26 agreements on methane and deforestation, and elections in Japan
Russia, India and France Crisis (Challenges)



COP26: Focus on Deforestation, Methane, and Coal
On 13 November, COP 26 the UN Climate Change Conference began in Glasgow, United Kingdom. It is being hosted by the UK in partnership with Italy, and will conclude on 13 November. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres introduced "We Built a World Unlike Any Other" as the theme of the summit.

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11 January 2022, Vol. 1, No. 11

Reviewing the COP 26: Major Agreements, Issues, and Challenges
COP 26 concluded with three major agreements on methane, coal and deforestation. Previous initiatives agreements on methane, coal and deforestation have not been able to deliver the commitment. The new agreements will have to be implemented in the previous ones to be successful.



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17 October 2021, Vol. 1, No. 10

Will against Malaria: Will the WHO-Approved RTS,S Vaccine be a gamechanger?
Though the newly approved RTS,S vaccine provides a ray of hope for regions severely affected by malaria-like Africa, the road ahead is a long and difficult one. Producing more efficacious vaccines, increasing healthcare funding, and a deeper research agenda at the Global South towards the Global South are some of the key challenges in the way of the complete elimination of malaria.



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7 September 2021, Vol. 1, No. 09

Drones: The Evolution, Types, Hypes and Controversies
Drones have evolved from being mere tools for surveillance to instrumental elements of power, prestige and technical prowess.



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28 December 2021, Vol. 1, No. 12

The Race for Hypersonic Missiles
In the 21st century, hypersonic missile technology has become the need of every country. It is viewed as a vital in modern power. China, the US, Russia, and North Korea have already tested missiles. Several countries like India, Australia, France, Germany, and Japan are also moving in the development of hypersonic technology. The consequences of the race, however, would be catastrophic.




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NIAS Area Studies
EUROPE MONITOR

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The Endgame Belarus-Poland Migrant Crisis




The European Union, Google, and the antitrust bill
"Her heart beats too": Poland's anti-abortion protests continue
The US-EU Steel and Aluminum Trade Rests Five Takeaways
The Impact of Climate Change on the European Wine Industry

NIAS Area Studies
EUROPE MONITOR

Vol. 01, No. 01, November 2021

Recent terror attacks in Europe: Five trends from England to Norway




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Germany and the European Energy Crisis
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Vol. 01, No. 01, October 2021

Terror Trial in Paris



Switzerland Referendum on Same-Sex Marriages
Polio's Europe Strategy
Migrant Crisis in Belarus
Hard Brexit 2

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